

Breaking Down the **BARRIERS**

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From the *Editor*

I was able to attend two of the Rural Workshops on Accessible Transportation, sponsored by Alberta Transportation and Utilities. I enjoyed meeting everyone and came away very impressed with how committed rural service-providers are to providing accessible transportation in their community. It's relatively easy to talk about providing services, but these folks are actually doing it and doing it really well!

And speaking of commitment, it was nice to hear Wendy Edey talk about how impressed she is with Alberta Transportation and Utilities' commitment to barrier free transportation. Wendy Edey is one of the members of the Advisory Committee on Barrier Free

Transportation. You'll learn a little more about her in this edition of Breaking Down the Barriers.

If you have any story ideas or information you think should be shared, call us at 427-7674.

RURAL WORKSHOPS

In late April and early May, Alberta Transportation and Utilities sponsored eight Rural Workshops on Accessible Transportation. The workshops were held province-wide in the communities of: Coaldale, Airdrie, Bonnyville, Wainwright, Lacombe, Edson, Westlock, and Peace River.

There were approximately 10 - 25 participants at each workshop. Some people drove from as far away as 120 kilometres in order to attend.

The workshops provided a valuable opportunity for:

- rural service-providers, municipalities and consumers to be brought up-to-date on provincial initiatives in accessible transportation, and



Participants share ideas at Rural Workshop in Airdrie

- workshop participants to meet one another and share their ideas/problems and solutions.

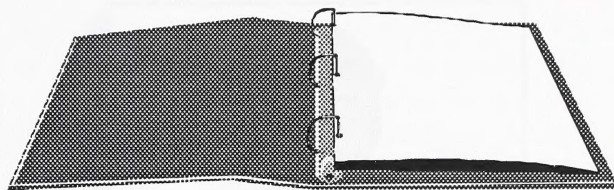
The day was chock full of information — and opportunities for participants to talk to one another. On the information side there were presentations on:

- three AT&U guides on: planning a transportation service in rural areas, driver training and increased access in pedestrian environments.
- profiles of people who have transportation disabilities (a collection of data presented by Diane Earl, Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities).
- accessible inter-city transportation system, and
- federal standards for vehicles, mobility aids, and passenger restraint systems.

Information-sharing was an important part of the day. In most cases, workshop participants separated into small groups in both the morning and the afternoon to discuss topics of common concern such as funding, pooling of resources, and changes in transportation.

It was evident from the beginning that everyone attending the workshops was strongly committed to providing accessible transportation services in their community. In some cases it appeared that seniors and persons with disabilities fared better, in terms of transportation, in small communities than in Alberta's large cities. The service was sometimes more personal and flexible.

Of course, small communities have their problems too. And resources are becoming more scarce. But the over all impression was that small communities are still looking to expand their services, not downsize. They may be able to achieve that through the pooling of resources. And these workshops provided one of the opportunities for them to move in that direction.



GUIDES AVAILABLE

Everyone who attended the rural accessible transportation workshops received a copy of the three guides prepared by AT&U.

A Guide for Drivers of Seniors and Persons with Disabilities

This guide will be of most use to drivers of seniors and persons with disabilities, particularly those from rural and smaller centres, where formal driver training programs are not available. It includes information on customer service, basic handling of mobility aids, loading and unloading passengers, defensive driving, and collision & emergency procedures.

Let's Plan On It! A Guide to Providing Transportation Services in Rural Areas for Seniors and Persons with Disabilities

If you work in or with a municipality, service organization or consumer group and want to develop a local public transportation system for use by seniors and persons with disabilities this guide will help you set it up. Topics include: Planning for your Community's Needs, Analyzing Existing Transportation Services, and Making Basic Service Decisions.

Guidelines for the Design of Safe Accessible Pedestrian Environments

The idea behind this guide is for professionals and municipalities to incorporate accessible design features when they create pedestrian environments — make it so everyone can use it. The guidelines were developed by landscape designers, engineers, architects, consumers and municipal employees. They will be of most interest to anyone involved with rehabilitating or creating pedestrian environments. The guide covers: sidewalk gradients/ramps, street furniture (eg. light poles, signs, bike racks etc.), use of paving stones, and optimum sidewalk width.

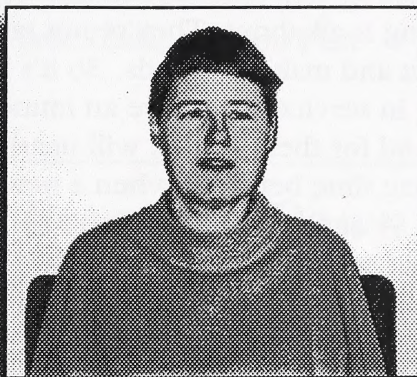
Currently, there is no charge for any of these guides. If you'd like a copy, contact Catherine Taylor at Alberta Transportation and Utilities in Edmonton at 427-7944.

Profile

MEMBER OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON BARRIER FREE TRANSPORTATION

Name: *Wendy Edey*

Occupation: *Provisionally chartered psychologist, Hope Foundation, University of Alberta, Edmonton*



Wendy Edey, Advisory Committee Member

Interest in Barrier Free

transportation: "I'm blind. And so I bring a consumer perspective to the board. But not all that long ago I worked for two of the organizations whose members/clients use accessible transportation, (the C.N.I.B. and Edmonton's Advisory Board on Services for Persons with Disabilities) so I understand the organizational perspective as well."

Her thoughts on the role of the Advisory Committee:

"This is one case where a department has actually made a commitment to do something. They're not waiting for the Advisory Committee to force them into action. So our role as members of the Advisory

Committee is to represent organizations who know what the issues are. We also represent the consumer's point of view and in doing so ask questions about department initiatives that clarify whether or not it's the right thing to do."



Biggest challenge in providing

accessible transportation: "People with disabilities are taught in their rehabilitation training to get by without services — that's what rehabilitation training is all about. They're not taught to go out and make demands. So it's hard to bring in services and have an immediate demand for them. There will nearly always be a lag time between when a new service starts — and when there's enough demand for that service to make it viable. Remembering and realizing that is our biggest challenge."

Did You Know?

There are more than
125 communities in the province
providing more than 48,000
Albertans with accessible
transportation services.

*Source: 1994 Study by AT&U of
Transportation for Seniors and
Persons with Disabilities in Alberta.*

AIRPORT ACCESSIBILITY

Edmonton's International Airport has recently taken some great strides towards improving accessibility.

Additions at the airport's terminal building include some major improvements for deaf and hearing impaired travellers: amplified pay phones, public TTYs and a counter loop system at the information booth.

Telephone booths and counters have been lowered for wheelchair users. Signs have been lowered and converted to large print and escalators have coloured coding for visually impaired travellers.

All of these improvements are the result of recommendations made by the airport's Barrier Free Committee, comprised of consumers with disabilities and representatives from disability organizations.

With the support of Transport Canada, the airport has also been operating a weekly cross-disability training program for its personnel for the past year. This program will now run once a month.

Recently, Edmonton Airports was recognized for the improvements. C.N.I.B. presented the airport with a White Cane

Week Certificate of Merit Award on February 5, and the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association (CHHA) presented it with a Certificate of Recognition on March 13.

reprinted with the permission of Status Report: The Newsletter of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities, May 1996

Did You Know?

There are 159 organizations providing accessible transportation services in this province. More than 84 per cent of those organizations offer their services to seniors.

Source: 1994 Study by AT&U of Transportation for Seniors and Persons with Disabilities in Alberta.

UPDATE ON LIGHT RAIL VEHICLE RAMPS

In the December issue of *Breaking Down the Barriers* we reported on the installation of onboard accessible ramps in one Light Rail Vehicle (LRV) each in both Edmonton and Calgary. The ramps had a test period of six months to see how reliably they'd operate in cold weather conditions.

But even before the six-month testing period was up, the verdict was in. The

project was a success! So now, both Edmonton Transit and Calgary Transit will be installing more ramps as the funds become available. The goal is to have an onboard accessible ramp installed in each Light Rail Vehicle. This will make it easier for someone in a wheelchair or scooter to board an LRV.

The original installation of the ramps was made possible by a grant from Alberta Transportation and Utilities. It's just one of the initiatives undertaken as part of the Barrier Free Transportation Plan.

Breaking Down the Barriers

Editorial Board: Catherine Taylor, Coordinator, Barrier Free Transportation; Bob Rebus, Urban Transportation Engineer; Teresa Atterbury, Editor, Communications.

Breaking Down the Barriers is published by Alberta Transportation and Utilities in an effort to provide timely information about transportation issues of interest to persons with disabilities and related organizations and consumer groups in Alberta. If we've missed any interested groups, let us know and we will include them on the mailing list.

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